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ABSTRACT

Historically, urban and suburban interests have dominated educational policy at the national level, but recognition of the need for federal rural education policy is growing. Effective educational policy for rural people, who account for one-third of the U. S. population, must consider the distinctive characteristics of rural areas. Vast cultural differences exist in rural America as well as disparate socioeconomic levels, with rural people (especially rural minorities), generally below the national average. While the urban to rural population turnaround is affecting many rural communities in complex ways, other rural communities continue to lose population. Academic achievement of rural students has begun to reach the national average only recently; the same is true of rural teachers' qualifications and salaries. Financing problems are severe for isolated and sparsely populated school districts, where per pupil costs are necessarily high. Specific issues in developing policy for rural education include the pros and cons of consolidating school districts, involvement of local people in the development of their schools, financing, curriculum and personnel needs, appropriate use of educational technology, and the need for relevant research. Rural education policy, if it is to improve rural schools, must be part of a comprehensive plan for rural development. (JH)

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RURAL EDUCATION - KEY POLICY ISSUES

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RURAL EDUCATION - KEY POLICY ISSUES

Since most of the people of the world live in villages - and since, coincidentally, it is those same people who typically depend directly on the land for their subsistence and possess the smallest per-capita share of the world's material wealth . . . it should come as no surprise that developing delivery systems to provide any kind of educational opportunities in small villages has never been a local or international priority, since to do so with any real integrity would predetermine a heightened awareness on the part of these anthropologically slumbering millions, which would have certain and irreversible consequences for the ruling classes, both locally and internationally, that would not at the outset appear desirable to them. (Bunhardt 1977)

-Bill Vaudrin

The educational reforms of this century have generally overlooked the special problems of the rural portion of the society, not only in the developed, but also in the underdeveloped nations as well. Phrases such as "this is not economically feasible," or "there are too few concentrated in one area to be able to work with" are often heard. Then there are other questions concerning any differences in rural and urban and suburban children. Usually the answer, not well thought out, has been no. People are people and schools are schools wherever they may be found. Because of this philosophy, policies regarding education have been primarily developed for all schools and all children, ignoring the facts that there may be vastly different needs associated with educating people in the rural areas of a country.

Henry Hyde (1978) pointed out, in a speech in June 1978 to the Western Regional Round-up Conference of the Rural Home Services at the University of Montana, that rural America suffered from neglect, disorganization, and lack of federal rural development policy. This is especially true of education in rural areas. We have seen in the past decade an up-surge in

rural development programs. However, especially in the developed countries such as the United States, if you look at the rural development programs, you will often find very little mention of the educational institutions within the rural areas. This is not necessarily true of all of the developing countries, however, because a great many of them have recognized the need for development of education along with the economic and social development of an isolated and rural area.

Another problem with the policy development for rural education in the past has been the belief among the many non-rural people that all rural areas have most of these characteristics in common. Jonathan Sher (1977, 1978) very ably pointed out in many of his writings that rural America, its people and its communities, are so diverse that it is extremely difficult to find evidence that supports nearly any one characterization. Sher goes on to say to think in terms of one best reform strategy throughout rural America is ludicrous. He states, further, that any reform strategy which seeks to circumvent local traditions, values, beliefs, and capabilities rather than build on them is bound to fail. Any policy for education in rural America must take into account the vast differences in people from different rural areas.

As was mentioned earlier, much of the policy developed for rural communities has failed to include policy for rural education. Ross and Green (1979) in their paper on the impacts of reverse migration on rural education report that education is one of the many social institutions, organizations and other groups which together form a basis to which community members can relate. Changes rising inside and outside the community will affect, to varying degrees, all functional areas of a community.

Rural populations are not insignificant in most countries, and Sher (1978) points out that perhaps the most significant fact about rural schools is the number of students who attend them. In 1978, more than fifteen million children, ages five through seventeen, were enrolled in rural and non-metropolitan schools. This number was 32 percent of the children enrolled in school in the entire nation.

In actual theory, all the general educational policy from the federal level should be directed towards rural as well as urban and suburban areas. In actual practice, this has not been the case. Most people with the power to make policy decisions concerning education at the federal level and, a great many times, at the state level have a major interest in urban and suburban rather than rural problems. As a result, many educational policies have been directed towards solving these problems in urban and suburban areas. There are some indications, however, in the United States, that at the federal level this is beginning to change. The U.S. Office of Education and The National Institute of Education both are developing programs to look at the needs of education in rural America. These will both be mentioned in more detail later in this paper.

Other areas of the world are well ahead of the United States in attempting to develop policy for rural education. An excellent example is the INTERSKOLA group, composed of educators from the Scandinavian countries and the British Isle, which for a number of years has met annually to discuss and develop plans for policy formation in their respective countries (International Conference on Education in sparsely populated areas, 1974). Australia has for years recognized the problem inherent with the education of isolated children and, at the federal and

provincial levels, has developed policy and programs to meet the special needs of rural people. The policy in the United States is one of attempting to fit all school systems into one mold. In other words, we have a policy to not have a specific policy for education in rural areas.

In recent years, however, some people have been attempting to point out the unique problems of educating the rural child and the need for a federal policy. In testimony to the sub-committee on agriculture and labor, the Committee of Education and Labor in the House of Representatives, Dr. Gloria Mattera (1974), who directs the New York State Migrant Center, University College of Arts and Science at Geneseo, New York, strongly indicated that educational policies should be coordinated with those of agriculture. According to Dr. Mattera, the needs of the migrant child cannot be adequately met if each agency operates independently without coordinating their efforts. This is also true of rural education throughout the world. There needs to be a coordinated effort between development of policy in rural areas for labor, economic development, rural development, and education as well.

As recent as August 20, 1979, in testimony prepared by the Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress, for the subcommittee on rural development (1979), the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry of the United States Senate, Paul Erwin, an analyst in the Education and Public Welfare Division of the Congressional Research Service, stated that the small school districts with enrollment of under 2,500 pupils may represent a special rural educational problem. Although these districts account for only 19 percent of all enrolled pupils, they count for more than three-quarters of all school districts and the vast majority of them are located in non-metropolitan areas. In comparison with the national averages, these

smaller districts have higher expenditures per pupil, they spend more for administration of pupil transportation, participate less frequently in federal educational programs and have lower pupil-teacher ratios. He went on to point out that no statistics on educational performance for these school districts appear to be available. It is assumed that many of these districts are located in sparsely populated areas.

HISTORICAL TRENDS IN POLICY DEVELOPMENT FOR RURAL EDUCATION

It would be entirely wrong to say that there has never been any attempt at the federal level to develop policy for rural education. The Morrill Act, which as early as 1862 developed the land grant college system in the nation, was an extremely important beginning for federal involvement in education. In 1917, the Smith Hughes Act was the beginning of vocational education financed from the federal level. That act recognized that agriculture was an extremely important industry in the nation and developed programs for financing vocational agriculture in the rural schools across the country. Also, the Bureau of Indian Affairs has developed programs for financing vocational agriculture in the rural schools across the country. Also, the Bureau of Indian Affairs has developed programs for over 70 years for American Indians living on reservations in rural areas. Each of these major attempts in policy formation have been fairly narrow in their definition, by only looking at education, and a very small segment of education in the rural areas. Each, because of lack of coordination with other rural policies, separated the important function of education from the other social and economic programs in the rural communities

Within the last decade, there have been a number of attempts to point out the need for developing policy for rural education at the national level. In 1969, a Task Force on rural education was formed in the U.S. Office of Education (Report of the Task Force Under Rural Education, 1969). However, there is little evidence that any policy recommended by the 1969 Task Force was implemented. Some exceptions can be noticed especially in vocational education, but these were generally policies from the state level rather than from the national level. Generally, the report from the Task Force was completely ignored. In 1977, another report (Report to the U.S. Office of Education of the National Task Forces on Instructional Strategy in Schools With High Concentration of Low Income Pupils, 1977) developed recommendations on urban, rural, migrant, native American and bilingual, bicultural education. The report recognized that the cultural traditions of rural society can create difficulties in developing policy for rural pupils. Other attempts have been made, in which little progress was shown. In 1970, Senator Spong from Virginia called a subcommittee hearing to get information on education, and rural America, but very little happened other than a committee report was issued.

Other types of policy which could have a direct effect upon education in rural America have been developed by such agencies as Agriculture, Labor, and Health. One of the real difficulties in the past has been that such policies have not been coordinated because each agency has gone its own separate way.

One of the most recent efforts, the Rural Development Act in 1972, attempted to coordinate policy, but in actual practice failed to do so. Funds from this act went to the land grant universities in each state.

The presidents of the land grant universities had the responsibility for disbursement of funds. In the majority of cases, the funds were passed on to the Dean of the College of Agriculture and the extension and research programs which are, in part, in the colleges of agriculture. This does not mean the agriculture colleges have not attempted to broaden their horizons, but because of the biases which are inherent in a discipline, development in rural America has tended to be limited to that of agriculture or economic development.

Ed Moe and Lou Tamblin (1978) stated that those engaged in the development of rural schools become convinced that one cannot fundamentally improve rural schools by working exclusively on the school. Rural communities, rural society, the supporting agencies for education and in fact total society must be taken into account. It is extremely important, then, in a research program on rural schools and community development, that a total national approach be taken.

In the testimony presented by the Congressional Research Service Library of Congress for the subcommittee on rural development, Committee on Agriculture and Nutrition and Forestry, United States Senate (1979), the statement was made that nonstatistical studies had been made by various scholars about the educational problems of the small communities in rural areas. Most of these studies, however, did not have a national scope for reference or rather focused on specific problems, for example, education of a particular migrant labor camp or on a specific Indian reservation. These studies can be informative about the kinds of problems that exist in individual rural localities, but they cannot indicate the extent of the

problems nationally. The determination of the extent of these problems would probably have to wait the undertaking of a systematic national study. In the past year to year and one-half, there has been concerted effort at the national level to obtain information with which to develop policy for education in rural America in both the National Institute of Education and the U.S. Office of Education. A weakness in each agency has been that of looking at education by itself without looking at the needs of the total rural communities. To be effective there must be a coordinating policy.

Looking at economic and rural development, in which education is an extremely important sector. Each agency has attempted, however, to collect information from people within the field of rural education on the development of policy. The program by the U.S. Office of Education is quite promising. In this program a series of eleven meetings have been held throughout the nation, and rural school practitioners have been invited to participate in these meetings and react to questions concerning policy in rural America. The program by the National Institute of Education (NIE) has not been as comprehensive. It has looked primarily at separate small research questions. The majority of the people with whom the questions have been brought up and discussed have been those concerned with the theory of rural education rather than the practice. Many of the people whom they have listened to extensively had an excellent theoretical approach to solving problems in rural America but little practical experience. It is hoped that the NIE, too, will start bringing in teachers, administrators and board members from rural America to help in the formation of policy for rural education.

It is also hopeful that the new Department of Education will coordinate these efforts and, under its new Office of Rural Education, will start to develop a national policy. In the plans for the new Department of Education, which was recently formed, an Office of Rural Education appears. Many of us question the placement, however, as it is in the Bureau of Adult and Occupational Education. This may tend to narrow its focus. It is hoped that Congress will soon see fit to remove this from that Bureau to a more appropriate place.

CHARACTERISTICS OF RURAL SCHOOLS AFFECTING POLICY

A very logical question has been asked: "Why should there be a separate policy for rural schools other than the national or state policy for all schools?" There is ample evidence that the characteristics of both the schools and the people involved with these schools in rural areas are somewhat different from most urban or suburban areas. These differences will be discussed in this section. There is a misconception that there are very small numbers of students in rural schools today. This is not true. As Tamblyn (1971) points out, approximately 25 percent of the population today lives in the country and in towns of 2,500 or less, while over 35 percent live in non-metropolitan areas of 50,000 or less. Approximately one-third of the population in the United States does not live in urban areas.

There is a wide disparity in the socio-economic level of rural people. Generally, the socio-economic level in rural areas is less than that in

the suburban areas. As a rule, the students do come from more disadvantaged families. The study by John Adams (1977) of the labor markets in the rural South, has stated, as one of his major conclusions, that substantial portions of rural southern populations are unable to obtain income through work and that rural workers are handicapped in their income generating efforts by low education levels, lack of training, lack of work experience, health problems, employment discrimination, and employment discrimination by race and sex. This is not only true of rural minorities in the South. Rural minorities throughout the nation generally are from much lower socioeconomic levels than nearly any other group found in this country. Drum (1977) reported, in her study of the Northern Cheyenne Tribe, that the resources of the Cheyenne had been mismanaged and unemployment on the reservation was extremely high. This is true of Indians throughout the nation. On reservations, we generally find very high levels of unemployment, many times going over 50 percent.

It should also be recognized that there are vast cultural differences in rural America and that there are a number of mini rural cultures spread throughout the land. The rural black culture is extremely different from that of the mid-western farm population, the western ranch population, or the Indians of Alaska. And yet each of these cultures come from rural areas. Sher (1978) indicated that, while adverse educational conditions exist throughout the nation in rural areas, they are more prevalent in the South as a region and among Blacks, Hispanics, and Native Americans.

For many decades, the trend in rural areas was for migration into the urban areas. However, there is some evidence throughout the world that this migration is decreasing and that there is now reverse migrations

from urban to rural settings. Ross and Green (1979) had reported that the first claims of turnabout occurred during the 1970's when demographer Calvin Beal reported that from 1970 - 1973 non-metropolitan areas gained 4.2 percent in population, compared to 2.9 percent for the metropolitan areas. This is not necessarily an urban sprawl with populations from urban areas flowing over into adjacent rural communities. Rural communities throughout the nation are increasing in population. It should also be recognized, however, that many rural communities are still losing population and thus have smaller school enrollments.

This reverse migration may be due to a number of factors. First, there is a tendency for people to want to live in the country; they see this as a better place to raise their families. Second, a great many of the rural communities are experiencing an influx of certain types of industry. An excellent example is the energy industries throughout the western part of the United States, with the concomitant influx of people into the coal, oil, and uranium producing communities. This large increase of people has caused several problems for schools within those particular communities.

Studies have shown that the majority of emigrants moving into rural areas have higher levels of education, training and experience, belong to professional manager occupations; and are from smaller families than the old rural to urban migrants were (Ploch, 1977, Ross and Green, 1979). Ross and Green also reported that 46 percent of non-metropolitan whites moving to metropolitan areas had some college training, compared to 18 percent of their non-mover counterparts. At the same time, 34 percent

of the metropolitan migrants who moved into non-metropolitan areas between 1970 and 1975 had completed some college compared to 17 percent of the non-metropolitan non-movers.

Many of the people with higher levels of education who are moving from the urban to the rural areas want to become involved in the communities, and they are finding that the likelihood for them to have some input early is through school boards. A number of such people are being elected to school boards. This is causing frustrations among the traditional occupants of those particular rural communities. Some communities are primarily retirement communities, and the migrants are much older people. This has a different effect upon the schools, for they are much more conservative and less likely to vote for change and innovation than are younger, more educated migrants. Moore (1978) stated that an in-depth study of the process of population change in New York State found that the less densely settled an area, the more likely it is to grow in the 70's. The findings also indicated there is a much larger percentage growth in the less densely populated areas than the more populated areas.

Care should be taken, however, not to over generalize the reverse migrations. There are still a great many rural communities that are losing in population. Burlingame (1978) reported in Illinois that a great many of the rural school districts are still losing enrollment. This in itself is causing some serious problems for rural schools.

In the past, the products of rural schools were generally at lower levels of attainment than the products of urban and suburban schools. However, there are indications now that this is changing. The median

number of school years completed by non-metropolitan adults is almost one year less than the national average. The proportion of non-metropolitan adults who have completed four years of high school or college is also smaller than the national average. Literacy levels for adults are much lower. This is not true when we look at a rural youth. Where rural schools may once have provided education of lower quality, they no longer do so, and more rural schools are performing equal to or better than the average. The educational performance of children currently attending rural schools is similar to the national average, although there are some noticeable exceptions (Rural Development, An Overview, 1979). The students from the extremely small schools, which contain approximately 10 percent of the population perform at a level significantly below the national average in most subjects. However, we find that the inner-city group has scores even lower than those of disadvantaged rural groups. As I mentioned earlier, the trend for the past ten years has been for most of the rural students to do as well as average students from other areas.

Personnel working in the rural schools are generally classified as having less education than those of the urban and suburban schools. This, again, is rapidly changing, and personnel from rural schools now have much more of a tendency to stay in rural schools than in the past. We see a great many promising young administrators who now view the rural schools as an avenue for their professional growth and development rather than a stepping stone to a larger school in the city. There are still some discrepancies, however, especially in the areas of equal pay and in levels of education.

Due to the nature of the smallness of the rural school, the curriculum offerings are generally much smaller than will be found in the larger schools. There is not the opportunity for the student to broaden himself with elective subjects or even to specialize in such things as vocational education.

Another major area for concern is that of financing the rural school. The cost per student in rural schools in America is almost always higher than the cost per student where there are larger units and greater efficiency. These characteristics are very closely related. Geographic isolation means fewer students. There are some basic costs which are present regardless of the number of students served, and efficiency is obtained with larger numbers of students. We should be careful, however, not to equate efficiency of education with quality of education.

POLICY ISSUES TO FACE

Some of the issues which must be addressed in developing policy for education in rural areas are as follows: (1) should there be a separate policy for rural areas and rural schools; (2) the degree of isolation of the schools and people within the particular state or country; (3) with regard to the structure of the schools, should they be consolidated or maintained in each individual community or village; (4) what degree of local involvement and voice the people in a particular community should have in their schools; (5) how the schools will be financed; (6) what should be the curriculum in the schools; (7) what should be the staffing and personnel needs of the school; (8) what level of technology should

be used in education; and (9) what level of research and dissemination of research information is needed, not only to develop policy for rural education but to continue the operations of the schools. There are undoubtedly other points to consider, but these would be basic to development of any policy for rural education.

The question of whether there should be a policy for rural schools or not is one that cannot be simply answered yes or no. In the first place, if it is decided that there is to be no policy difference between rural and urban and suburban schools, this in itself will dictate that the policy for rural areas will be the same as the policy for the entire nation or state. Failure to develop separate policy is a failure to recognize that the characteristics and needs of the people in the rural areas are different.

The degree of isolation is extremely important. In a great many places, degree of isolation has been lessened by the building of freeways and modern highways, as well as modern communications such as television. In a great many places, however, there are still very few roads, and electronic communications may be nonexistent. The geography, terrain and weather also have a great deal to do with degree of isolation. In a flat area with little rain and no snow, it would be much easier to bus children and bring them to a central point than it would be in an area high in the mountains where there is a large amount of snowfall during the wintertime.

The question of how the school should be structured has for a number of decades been a central question in the United States. A few

years back, there were those who felt that all the problems of rural education would be solved if only the schools were consolidated and made larger. Jonathan Sher (1977) and a great many others have pointed out the fallacy of this philosophy, and there is a tendency now toward smaller schools which are much closer to the communities. Consolidation or nonconsolidation, however, is not the real question. The problem is how to develop quality of education for the people, both youth and adults within the communities. Consolidation is nothing but a tool for bringing about this quality education. In some cases, it may be more effective to consolidate. In many other cases, the worst thing that may happen to the community is for the school to disappear.

The needs and philosophies of the community are very important concerning consolidation. Cohnstaedt (1973) in reporting on the building of a large vocational resource center in the northern areas of Saskatchewan Province in Canada, stated that first a large vocational school was intended for construction. But then, because of the known disinclination of native people to seek training away from their home communities, additional studies were initiated to determine area training needs. Interviews and observations conducted indicated that the vocational school should be a vocational resource center instead. Such a program would aid in the identification of area community needs and provide training programs closer to the homes of the people within the communities. Annika Andrae (1974) reported that in Sweden, the policy now is to retain as many of the small schools as possible in rural areas. This, too, was due to considerations about the influence the local people wanted to have within their particular school system.

There is increased recognition that policy formation and decisions concerning rural schools and the development of rural areas should respond to the input and involvement of the people affected. Hall (1975) indicated that increased participation in decision making at the grass roots level is one of the principal objectives of Tanzania's development strategy. Since the political decision to commit Tanzania to a path of socialism was made, the resurrection of education systems has been a corner stone in achieving the desired participation. The involvement of people in the local communities is a key element in this development.

One of the primary questions that should be answered in development of policy is that of financing. Generally, rural areas, especially those with isolated communities, find it impossible to obtain complete financing from the local area for the schools. It is important that consideration be given to centralized financing from either state or federal level for the isolated rural school. In the development of a financial base for the rural schools, it is also important to realize that small numbers of students often do not generate enough funds to conduct an adequate educational program. It should be recognized that smaller numbers of students may need special consideration in financing in order to have an adequate base. Some states have recognized this and have developed formulas which account for smallness and isolation. This is a step in the right direction, and policy makers should continue to realize that there are certain basic costs to education regardless of the numbers of students. In rural isolated schools the cost per student will be much larger than in the more urban areas.

In the area of curriculum, the major question may be whether we educate for the local community or for somewhere else? This question must be addressed. Emotions and opinions should be avoided as much as possible in making these major curriculum decisions. Quite often, if the decision is made only to educate to move away, the cream-of-the-crop of the community is gone, and the community thus tends to die and become stagnant. Also, if the decision is made to educate only for local needs, many of the youngsters are deprived of the opportunity to move elsewhere and to be able to provide for themselves in other communities.

A major problem with rural schools in the past has been lack of adequate personnel. Quite often the teaching personnel have had lower levels of education. The educational personnel in rural areas are paid less than those in urban and suburban areas, thus making it less attractive to qualified people. In the past, rural schools have been seen as the stepping stone to something better. Because of proper financing, adequate pay, and other added incentives, however, this seems to be changing. We now find qualified teachers and administrators who see in the rural schools a career for themselves and who intend to spend their life in a rural area. It is strongly recommended if there is a pay differential, the differential should be to pay more for the rural areas in order to attract and keep qualified people working there.

A major policy question which faces us today in rural education is that of the proper use of technology. At one time it was felt that the most sophisticated equipment would be the best equipment. This may not always be the case. A report of the Implication of Alaska Educational Satellite Communications Demonstration for Technology and Engineering

(1975) indicated that the satellite was not always worthwhile and that it was but one way of providing telecommunications coverage. Funding should further be considered focusing on secondary school education, providing tape as well as real-time video rather than expensive satellite coverage. It was also recommended that the village or regional people control the plans and curriculum for the educational programs that are beamed at the isolated rural students.

There is a real need for further experimentation in testing and the use of technology in providing education to rural areas. The report of the Communications in Rural America Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation (1978) stated that the President should form an inter-agency committee to plan a system demonstration program to test the economic viability and demand for communications systems in rural areas. An over-riding concern was that need should govern technology. Often in the past, it has seemed that the technology itself and questions concerning it have provided the basis for the policy rather than the needs of the people being served.

A final question which should be answered is that of developing adequate research and dissemination programs to meet the needs of rural education within a particular country or area. This paper has attempted to show that the educational needs of people in rural areas are somewhat different than the educational needs of urban or suburban people. Therefore, it is highly recommended that stronger research programs be developed in order to adequately understand what these needs are and how these needs can be met. It is equally important that adequate dissemination and diffusion programs be coordinated to develop strategies that would bring proper change for the improvement of education in rural America.

WHICH POLICY WILL BE ADOPTED

It is no longer a question of having policy for education in rural areas. As has been pointed out earlier in this paper, if the decision is made not to have a separate policy then this in itself dictates specific policy for education in rural schools. It dictates that whatever state or federal policy is mandated or developed for urban and suburban areas also becomes the policy for the rural areas. It is extremely important that both federal and state governments recognize that there are unique problems of education in rural and isolated areas. These problems are due primarily to the geographic isolation and small number of students in rural areas. Policy must be developed which will be specifically geared to help the people in these areas meet their educational needs. Too often policies have been aimed at broad general areas and have been formed predominantly in response to input from urban and suburban America.

A better mechanism for policy input at the federal and state levels is needed for those persons involved in education from the rural areas. It must also be recognized that in the United States primary responsibility for education rests with the state. State departments of education should be strongly encouraged to strengthen their educational programs for isolated and rural students. In some other nations, the primary responsibility for education rests at the national level. If this is the case, policy makers at the national level should recognize the differences in the isolated rural areas, and specific programs should be developed for the people in those areas. It is extremely important that any national policy for rural education should support and in turn be supported by

a stronger policy for rural development. For any state or region, policy for rural education should be a part of a total policy for rural development.

One of the greatest areas of need for change in policy for rural areas is that of financing. New state or federal assistance programs to rural areas could be developed which would recognize that it does cost more per pupil to educate students in rural areas than in urban or suburban areas. The existing programs could be altered in order to meet these higher costs associated with meeting the educational needs of rural students.

Legislation is needed which will aid the rural school to perform better. Jonathan Sher (1978) listed six legislative alternatives to insure that rural schools and districts be able to provide all their students with high quality and appropriate educational opportunities. He listed the following: (1) revising the state education regulations and mandates which unnecessarily restrict local flexibility in the provision of educational services, (2) creating an office of rural education with the state education agency, (3) enacting legislation which provides funds for the development of appropriate curricula materials for rural schools, (4) encouraging the sharing of resources among rural schools and districts, (5) encouraging the development and utilization of advanced technologies in the delivery of rural education services, and (6) encouraging the creation of regional educational services agencies for rural areas. Although these six may not be all inclusive; they do include the major areas of reform for education in rural areas.

It should also be recognized that the majority of this paper was centered on the needs of isolated rural education in the United States where the primary responsibility for education rests with the state and

not at the national level. However, most of the principals involved in strengthening rural education in such a governmental arrangement would also be applicable where there is a strong centralized educational program at the national level. Here too, it should be recognized that the needs of the rural people are different than those of urban and suburban people. And it is extremely important that local involvement be encouraged for the development of curriculum and school programs. It should be recognized that rural school programs should be somewhat different than those at urban or suburban schools. It must also be recognized that financing for rural schools should be approached differently, and that it will cost more per student in rural areas.

Another major recommendation concerns school personnel. In the past, in a great many countries, rural teachers, administrators, and other staff have been paid less than those in urban and suburban areas. This should be reversed in order to encourage teachers not only initially to start their professional careers in rural areas but also to see remaining in a rural school as a satisfactory possibility in planning their professional lives.

Intervention is needed from state and federal levels to encourage and develop better educational programs for both youth and adults. The question of finances often appears, and we ask ourselves, can we afford to? It is more appropriate to ask, can we afford not to? Can we afford the ignorance and waste of human potential that is taking place in the rural areas of the world?

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